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Merlin (standing) is in pursuit of the Dark Riders in the Secret King.

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**Circulation Director
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**Cover
SANJULIAN**

**Writers In This Issue
NICOLA CUTI
BILL DuBAY
BUDD LEWIS
ROGER McKENZIE
WALLY WOOD**

**Artists In This Issue
ESTEBAN MAROTO
GONZALO MAYO
WALLY WOOD**

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Ring of the Warlords

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12 THE LAST DRAGON KING She came to Tucwel to seek her fortune and found immortal life and love. But it was the immortality of a vampress and a love whose life fate would shortly take. She & the Dragon King had a child whose destiny came from each one!

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33 PRELUDE TO ARMAGEDDON Before Earth there was Iyith. A paradise populated by the mythical beasts and demons of a later Earth's legends. Iyith was a paradise where the forces of good held sway until the day when Karion marched & made paradise lost!

45 A SECRET KING As Rome's swank and sway fell back from the edges of the world, a tide of darkness began to sweep forward. But as the kingdom of darkness waxed there was born one who set a fire burning to last 1500 years! But first Merlin's pupil had to grow & learn!

65 DAX THE DAMNED Lesser gods than this have tormented the souls of man. Dax the damned is fished out of humanity's pool to swim and play among the gods. But the gods live to kill and Dax must die inch by inch as the toy of the gods plays his game.

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THE CURSE

HE WAS AFRAID... THAT MUCH HE KNEW, AND THAT SOMETHING HAD JUST HAPPENED... SOMETHING TERRIBLE, BUT WHAT IT WAS HE DID NOT KNOW. HE DID NOT KNOW WHERE HE WAS OR HOW HE HAD COME TO BE THERE....

... IT WAS AS IF THIS WAS THE VERY FIRST MOMENT OF TIME... AND FOR HIM IT WAS THERE WAS NO MEMORY OF YESTERDAY TO GIVE HIM IDENTITY...

THIRSTY...

WHAT-?!
NO!

NO! THAT IS NOT ME!
IT CAN'T BE!

HE SOON CAME UPON A CLEARING, AND...

COME...
I HAVE BEEN
WAITING FOR
YOU...

THE WOMAN LED
HIM INSIDE, AND
BEGAN TO PREPARE
DINNER, AS SHE
WORKED SHE
TALKED... AND AS
SHE TALKED HE
BEGAN TO
UNDERSTAND...

I AM ZARA... YOU DO
NOT KNOW YOUR NAME?

NO, I...

BUT... ENOUGH OF
THAT FOR NOW... WE
SHALL DISCUSS IT ALL
WHEN WE HAVE
EATEN...

THEN... SOMEONE
HAS SOMEHOW STOLEN
MY MEMORY... MY
IDENTITY... AND
TURNED ME INTO
THIS THING THAT I AM...

YES... YOU ARE
THE VICTIM OF
A SPELL, AN EN-
CHANTMENT... AS
I AM!

BUT I KNOW
WHO IS RESPONSIB-
LE, AND IF YOU
WILL HELP ME,
PERHAPS WE
CAN DO
SOMETHING!



WHAT IS YOUR CURSE? YOU DO NOT SEEM TO BE—

I WILL TELL YOU OF THAT WHEN IT IS TIME... BUT I KNOW THAT IT WAS THE WORK OF THE WITCH ARACHNE, WHO DWELLS NEARBY...



I MUST CALL YOU SOMETHING, HOW ABOUT ZORG? I LIKE THAT! WILL YOU HELP ME, ZORG?

BUT... WHAT CAN I DO? I AM NO WIZARD.



THE SWORD IS ENCHANTED.. IT WILL KILL A WITCH, NO MATTER WHAT MAGICAL PROTECTION SHE HAS...

I WILL ATTRACT HER WHOLE ATTENTION TO ME, AND YOU WILL STRIKE!



ALL YOU NEED FEAR IS THAT YOU WILL BEGIN TO BELIEVE IN HER ILLUSIONS, APPARITIONS... AND I CAN HELP YOU TO AVOID THAT...

VERY WELL... I WILL DO IT... LET US GO...

PRESENTLY, THEY EMERGED FROM THE FOREST...



ONE MORE QUESTION ZARA... ARE YOU A WITCH TOO?

NO, I AM NOT... BUT I LEARNED SOMETHING OF SORCERY FROM... FROM MY MOTHER...

BUT NOW NO MORE QUESTIONS! WE WILL SOON BE IN THE LAND OF ARACHNE... SO BE PREPARED...

... FOR MADNESS!



LOOK! UP ON THAT CLIFF!

IT IS A SIGN WE ARE ENTERING THE LAND OF THE WITCH... IT SERVES TO DISCOURAGE INTRUDERS!

...AND FEELING THE FEAR GROW IN HIS HEART, AND WITH GREAT MISGIVINGS, ZORG FOLLOWED THE GIRL PAST THE HOLLOW STARE OF THE EERIE SENTINEL...

SUDDENLY, AS THEY ROUNDED A BEND...

LOOK OUT!
A MONSTER!

NO! STOP! IT
IS BUT AN
ILLUSION!

YOU ARE
RUNNING
INTO...

... A TRAP!

MY
ANKLE!

THE LIVING DEAD!

THEY
ARE REAL,
THEN?

YES... AND
THEY CAN KILL
US! THIS WAY...
QUICK!

THEY FOUND CONCEALMENT BEHIND A BOULDER, AND FROM THEIR VANTAGE POINT WATCHED THE EMERGENCE OF A GHASTLY ARMY... AN ARMY OF THE DEAD!

ZARA INDICATED A BOULDER, AND HE PUSHED IT ASIDE...

QUICK! INTO THE TUNNEL! THEY HAVE SEEN US!

YES, ZARA... BUT I... I AM AFRAID...



EEEE!
OH, FORGIVE ME, ZORG!
I CAN BE FOOLED, TOO!

SOMETHING HAS SEIZED ME!



ZARA! I AM BEING DEVoured!

KEEP FOLLOWING ME!
IT IS NOT REAL! RE-MEMBER THAT!



WE HAVE ARRIVED!
THE MOUTH OF THE SKULL IS THE DOORWAY... AND YOU MUST GO ON AHEAD!

FOR, UNLESS I CAN MAKE MY ENTRANCE UNSEEN, WE HAVE NO CHANCE!

NOW GO, AND PLEASE REMEMBER... YOU **MUST** HOLD HER ATTENTION UNTIL I ARRIVE!





HIS FLESH CRAWLING IN ANTICIPATION OF PAIN, HE STRODE INTO THE FLAMES...



... AND THEN THE ROOM WAS FULL OF MONSTERS, ATTACKING HIM WITH SAVAGE FRENZY FROM ALL SIDES...



HE KNEW, AND YET DID NOT KNOW, THAT HE WAS FIGHTING PHANTOMS... HE FELT PAIN AS SHARP TEETH RIPPED INTO HIS THROAT...



SUDDENLY, HIS MIND WAS CLEAR... AND HE SAW THAT THE BEAST WAS HIS OWN HAND! THEN HE REALIZED...



...IT WAS BECAUSE ZARA HAD ENTERED!



FOR A MOMENT THERE WAS ABSOLUTE SILENCE... THEN THE VERY AIR ABOUT THEM WAS RENT BY UNSEEN FORCES, AND THE SPIDER WAS NO LONGER A SPIDER, BUT A VERY OLD WOMAN...

... WHO FIXED HER EVIL GAZE UPON ZARA... A BOLT OF FORCE SEEMED TO LEAP OUT AT THE GIRL...



...AND ZARA CRUMPLED TO THE GROUND...



BUT IN THAT INSTANT, ZORG ACTED...



THEN SWORD DROPPING FROM NERVELESS FINGERS, HE TURNED TO THE FALLEN ZARA...

WE'VE DONE IT, ZARA!

ZARA!
ARE... ARE YOU GOING TO... DIE?



AND THEN, AS HE CRADLED THE FALLEN SCORCRESS IN HIS ARMS, SHE BEGAN TO SPEAK, IN A VOICE ALMOST INAUDIBLE...

YES... I AM DYING, ZORG... BUT DO NOT WEEP FOR ME...



I WANT TO DIE... THAT WAS PART OF MY PURPOSE IN COMING HERE! THE OTHER PART WAS TO AVENGE MYSELF ON HER...

BUT... NOW TAKE ME OUT OF HERE... I DO NOT WISH TO DIE IN THIS PLACE...

ZARA, I DON'T UNDERSTAND... SHE IS DEAD, BUT I AM STILL THE SAME...

THAT IS BECAUSE IT WAS *NOT* SHE WHO CAST THE SPELL UPON YOU... IT WAS I! WITH MY DEATH YOU WILL BE FREE!



WHAT? YOU? BUT... I...

DON'T... PLEASE DON'T HATE ME, ZORG... I TROKED YOU BECAUSE I COULD NOT SLAY HER MYSELF... I NEEDED SOMEONE TO DO IT WHILE I FOCUSSED HER MAGIC ON ME...



FORGIVE ME... AND DO NOT WEEP... I AM MORE THAN A THOUSAND YEARS OLD, AND WEARY OF LIFE... MY CURSE WAS IMMORTALITY!

NOW SHE IS DEAD, AND I CAN DIE, AND ALL IS RIGHT...



ZARA!

THEN THE PAIN BEGAN, AND HE KNEW SHE WAS DEAD. SLOWLY HE RETURNED TO HIS TRUE FORM, AND IN THAT ONE LAST MOMENT OF INTELLIGENCE, HE KNEW...

... AND UNDERSTOOD...



... AND HAPPILY SLITHERED OFF TO THE BOG, WHERE HIS ANXIOUS FAMILY WAITED FOR HIM.



END

"FROM 'A HISTORY OF ANCIENT PYTH' -- BY SIR C. W. CHESTERFIELD... 'AND SO, THE DRAGON KINGS REJECTED AN ALLIANCE WITH THE SAUS... THEIR FERCE, COLD BLOODED COUSINS TO THE NORTH... FROM THAT DAY ON...TILL THE DEATH OF GWAN, THE LAST DRAGON KING, THEY REMAINED THE BITTEREST OF ENEMES...'"

"SO THIS IS FABLED TUCWEL... MERCHANT CAPITAL AND THE 'PEARL' OF ALL ZANGORA!? 'SNOW'...!"

"FROM THE LOOKS OF THINGS IT WOULD SEEM I'VE MISSED LITTLE!"

"NOW WHAT HAVE WE HERE? YOU'VE NICE LESS, WENCH... WORTHY AT LEAST OF A FLAGON OF ALE AND A ROLL IN THE..."

"OH, NO...!"

"...HEY...!"
"O-CAREFUL, CHILD... IT WOULD BE A TERRIBLE LOSS SHOULD YOUR KNIFE HAND SLIP!"

"YOU'VE SPUNK, SIRL, I'LL GIVE YOU THAT! AND WELL YOU DO! TUCWEL LIES RICH IN ZANGORA FOR THE UNWARY!"

"AYE, THAT'S THE TRUTH RIGHT ENOUGH... IF RIVER TRUTH BE SPOKEN..."

"...BUT IT'S ALSO RICH WITH PLUNDER... AND THAT'S WHAT INTERESTS ME!"



MOANNNNN

EH?? I THOUGHT I HEARD A...



MORE TAKE ME FOR A FOOL!



STILL, I'VE BEEN BETTER IN MY TIME!

WAAAGH!



A B-BLOODSUCKER! RUN! RUN!

BLOOD-SUCKER...? WHAT ARE THEY BABBLING ABOUT?

RUNNING LIKE SHEEP! SURELY THE SIGHT OF BILLED BLOOD IS NOTHING...



...N-NEW?



MORE BE DAMNED!

HE PULLS THE SWORD FROM HIS CHEST!



A V-VAMPIRE! THAT'S WHY THE OTHERS HAVE FLED!

SNAP

HAHAHAHA HAHAHAHAHA



G-GOODS... BASH! SUCH MAJAN STRENGTH... CRUSHING... ME! YET I WILL NOT YIELD! I'M LYSSALYN OF SMOTH... A W-WARRIOR...A... WAR...



YORRR!

WHOOSH



A... A BOLT OF FIRE THAT LITERALLY DESTROYED THE BLOOD-SUCKER BUT NEVER TOUCHED ME--!? WHAT MANNER OF DARK SORCERY IS THIS?

FLAP FLAP

The Last DRAGON KING



...?

SHE IS THE ONE HE SEEK!

AND THAT, SON, IS HOW I MET YOUR FATHER...!



MY FATHER!
MOTHER HAS TOLD
ME OF HIM MANY
TIMES!



A-AND I STILL
REMEMBER HOW
HE DIED...
PROTECTING
US...

...FROM THE SALS...

AN AMBUSH!
LYSSA! HURRY...
GET OUR SON TO
THE SAFETY OF
THE CASTLE!



M-MY LORD...
I-I CAN'T
LEAVE...

THE BOY!
HE MUST NOT
ESCAPE!



YOU
HAVE
NO
CHOICE!

YES... DADDY... AS
WELL I KNOW! QUICKLY,
GWAN!

IF... IF GWAN
DIES, SO TOO DIE
THE DRAGON KINGS, FOR
HE IS THE LAST... AS
WELL YOU KNOW!

FATHER!
NO!



AND SOON, DEEP
WITHIN THE
CASTLE...



YOU STAY HERE,
GWAN! I MUST HURRY
TO YOUR FATHER!



'SNIF'...









...AND WE HAVE FAR TO TRAVEL BEFORE SUNRISE...



...I WOULD HAVE LIKED TO HAVE SPENT IT WITH MOTHER... AS SHE SAT THERE WAITING FOR THE DAWN FOR THE SUN'S FIRST RAYE TO SEND HER TO JOIN MY FATHER, FINALLY...



...BUT THERE IS MUCH, STILL, TO BE DONE AND I... I AM THE LAST DRAGON KING...

...DIFFERENT NOW, BECAUSE OF MOTHER AND THE BLOODSUCKER THAT ATTACKED HER... AND CHANGED HER... MANY YEARS BEFORE...



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PROLOGUE

JACKIE RAPER WAS AN ADVENTURER, A SWORDSMAN, AN ARCHER, A PRINCE, A KING. HIS FATHER WAS KING, WEALTHY BEYOND IMAGINATION. HIS TUTOR WAS THE GREATEST KNIGHT IN HIS FATHER'S COURT AND HIS RAIDS WERE THE CHILDREN OF NOBLE MEN AND GENTLE WOMEN.



JACKIE RAPER WAS NO DIFFERENT FROM ANY CHILD SEEKING THE WARMING COMFORTS OF FANTASY TO ESCAPE THE COLD INDIFFERENCE OF REALITY. HE WAS A DREAMER.



JACKIE RESEMBLED HIS DREAM. THEY WERE HIS WHITE STALLION, HIS ESCAPE FROM POVERTY, HUNGER, AND HIS FATHER'S HARD BOOY.



JACKIE KNEW THERE WAS LITTLE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN HIS FATHER AND HIM. WHEN JACKIE FLEW INTO ANOTHER NUMBING FANTASY, HIS FATHER HID FROM THE WORLD WITHIN A STUPOROUS FLASK OF CHEER BEER.



JACKIE REALIZED THAT SOMEDAY HE TOO WOULD HAVE TO DON THAT CYNICALLY HURRY-WHURLE OF MANHOOD HIS DREAMS WOULD DRIFT INTO THE NOTHINGNESS FROM WHENCE THEY CAME...AND HIS LIFE WOULD FOLLOW THE SAME PATH OF DRUDGERY HIS FATHER'S RIDE WENT.

AND HE TOO, WOULD TURN TO DROWNING HIS TROUBLES IN AN ALCOHOLIC STUPOR.



YET JACKIE UNDERSTOOD THAT HIS LIFE WAS HIS OWN. OVER YONDER HILL LAY HIS KINGDOM. HIS PRINCESS. HIS LIFE AS AN ADVENTURER, AND A HERO. WHILE HERE... WITH HIS FATHER... HE HAD ONLY A LIFE OF MISERY AND MARDON'S LAUGHING AT HIM.



JACKIE AND THE LEPRECHAUN KING

JACKIE HAD LIVED THROUGH STONY HOT, DRY, HUNGRY SUMMERS WHEN HE CROOED IT WAS TIME TO STRIKE OUT AND SEEK HIS FORTUNE.



HE HAD NO IDEA WHAT AWAITED HIM OVER THE NEXT HILL. HE KNEW ONLY THAT WHATEVER LURKED THERE, HE WOULD GREET IT WITH WELCOMING ARMS AND A HEARTY SMILE. FOR JACKIE KNEW... EVEN IF DISLOYALTY BITED HIM, IT WOULD BE A MORE PLEASANT BITE THAN THAT WHICH HE HAD LEFT BEHIND.



JACKIE FOUND HIS FATE... AND A LEPRECHAUN ON THE VERY FIRST DAY OF HIS NEW LIFE.





WELL? ARE YE GOIN' TO STAND THERE ALL DAY A'GAWKIN' AT A POOR MAN'S MISFORTUNE...

...OR WILL YA BE HELPIN' ME DOWN, LADDEY?



THAT'S WHAT I LIKE TO SEE. A MAN OF FEW WORDS / NO QUICK ACTION.



OGNF!?

NICE CUTTIN' LADDEY!



HE NAMED **BUBBA O'REILLY**... OF THE HARD DRINKIN', FAST LOVIN', FEISTY O'REILLYS, AND I'M IN YOUR DEBT, BOY.

YOU HAVE A NAME, BOY?



I'M **JACKIE PAPER**, ...OF THE FAST DRINKIN', HARD LOVIN' PAPERS.

AYE / AND I'LL BET YOU'D BE COMIN' FROM THE **WILLAGE** BELOW!

OH, NO, I'M A **PRINCE** AND AN **ADVENTURER**. I ... I LIVE HERE ... IN THE **FOREST** NOW!



A **PRINCE OF THE FOREST**? MY ... YOU ARE A **REGAL** ONE!

WELL, **PRINCELY JACKIE PAPER**, HOW WOULD YOU LIKE TO BE **JOININ' ME** IN A **SPOT OF BREAKFAST**?

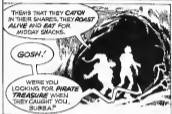
IT'S THE **LEAST** I CAN OFFER YOU IN **EXCHANGE FOR MY LIFE**.



THAT SOUNDS **GOOD**, BUT TELL ME ... HOW IS IT YOU CAME TO BE **DAMBLING** FROM A **ROPE** OUT HERE IN THE **FOREST**?

PIRATES, ME BOY!

THEY'VE GOT **TRAPS** ALL OVER THE **FOREST** ... JUST WAITIN' TO **SPRING** ON **UNBESPECTING** **FOLK** LIKE YOU'N ME!





SO, WITH EIGHT LONG SWAGGERS UNDER HIS BELT, JACKIE SETTLED INTO HIS NEW LIFE WITH BUBBA, CHAUNCEY AND THE OTHER DWARVES.

LEPRECHAUN KING OR FRAUD, JACKIE SOON DISCOVERED THAT BUBBA COULD BE ANYTHING HE DESIRED. JACKIE LEARNED, TOO, THAT HE HAD THE SAME MAGICAL POWERS OF IMAGINATION... AND TOGETHER, HE AND BUBBA SHOOK THE NA-TEST OF TIMES... B-TTLING PIRATES FIGHTING R-IDE'S... AND LEADING THEIR ARMIES INTO WAR WITH THE MAGICAL DR-SON, FLUFF.



WHILE BACK IN THE VILLAGE, JACKIE'S FATHER SHOWS UP UNDER THE STRAIN OF DREARY DAILY TOIL... COUPLED WITH THE WORRY OVER HIS LOST, LOVED SON.

IT'S BEEN WEEKS, ROBBY! WHERE COULD HE BE? WHAT COULD HAVE HAPPENED TO MY BOY?



W-H-E'S ALL I HAVE, S-SINCE HIS MOTHER DIED... IT AIN'T BEEN EASY FOR US, AND NOW...

...NOW...

WHO COULD HAVE STOLEN HIM FROM ME?



THERE'S NOWHERE HE COULD HAVE GONE, DAD. THERE AIN'T A VILLAGE WITH A HUNDRED MILES OF HERE.

DON'T BE SO SURE OF THAT, ROBBIE BOY!



I'VE HEARD HUNTERS TALK OF AN UNWOLLY VILLAGE NESTLED AWAY IN THE MOUNTAINS YONDER.

THERE'S RUMORS IT'S A VILLAGE OF THE DAMNED, INHABITED BY DEVILS' NIGHT-TALKING CREATURES!



IF YOUR JACKIE'S NOWHERE TO BE FOUND IN THIS VILLAGE, DABBY, IT'S A GOOD BET HE'S IN THE STEWPOD OF THOSE OGRES.

HOOO!
WE'VE GOT TO SAVE HIM! YOU'VE GOT TO HELP ME GET HIM OUT OF THERE!

CALM YOURSELF, DABBY! WE DON'T KNOW FOR SURE JACKIE'S IN THE HANDS OF DEVILS, WE DON'T EVEN KNOW IF THERE ARE ANY DEVILS... LET ALONE A VILLAGE OF THEM!

I FOR ONE, AM GOING TO FIND OUT... AND IF THERE'S A MAN AMONG YOU, HE'LL BE COMING WITH ME!

JACKIE'S LIFE IN AMARMONY WAS A GOOD ONE. SOMETIMES, HE WOULD HELP THE DWARVES IN THEIR FIELDS, YET, WHEN THE SUN WAS ITS BRIGHTEST, HE - NO BURN - COULD BE FOUND IN THE FORESTS... RISKING THEIR LIVES IN SEARCH OF PIRATES' TREASURE.



IT WAS ON JUST SUCH ONE OF THESE EXCURSIONS THAT BURR STUMBLED UPON THE BLOODTHIRSTY HAND OF CUTTHROAT/NO-TEARS!



DOWN, BOY! IT'S BLACKBARD HIMSELF... COME TO STEAL THE LEGENDARY LEPRECHAUN TREASURE!





WE'VE GOT TO
MARRY THE QUEEN.
BUBBA!

NO, BOY! IF THEY
SEE US, THEY'LL FOLLOW
US BACK TO HARMONY...
AND THERE'LL BE A
SLAYBAYTER!



ONLY WAY TO SAVE
HARMONY IS A
DIVERSION...

I'LL LEAD THEM
A MERRY CHASE, ME BOY.
YOU WARN THE
OTHERS!



BUBBA! NO
T- THEY'LL ASSE
SS YOU!

RUN, BOY! SAVE
YOURSELF! KING
BUBBA CAN TAKE
CARE O'HISSELF!



IT'S ONE'A
THE DEWON
PEOPLE!

KILL
HIM!

KETCH
'IM!

HELL LEAD
US TO THE
OTHERS



GRAB THE
BEGGAR!

SLIT
'IM!

GUT THE
DEWIL!

JACKIE HAD NO CHOICE, HE COULDN'T
HELP HIS TINY FRIEND NOW. ALL
HE COULD DO WAS RUN... WARN THE
DWARVES... AND HOPE THEY WOULD
BELIEVE!



CHAUNCEY!
CHAUNCEY!
H-HELP HIM!
T- THEY'VE GOT
BURBA!

JACKIE! SLOW DOWN,
WE BOY... THE DEWIL'S
NOT BREATHIN' DOWN
YER NECK!

IT'S PIRATES! THEY...
THEY'VE GOT SUBBA!
THEY'RE KILLING HIM!
WE... WE'VE GOT TO
SAVE HIM!

PIRATES? HUH, BOY!
THERE ARE NO
PIRATES THIS FAR
INLAND!



IT'S ALL YOUR
IMAGININGS... ALL A
GAME SUBBA IS HAVING
YOU BELIEVE.

NO! IT'S TRUE!
I SWEAR! THE PIRATES
ARE COMING... THEY'VE
GOT SUBBA AND
THEY'VE COMING
HERE!



COME, BOY... WE'VE
GOT NO TIME FOR
NONSENSE. WE'VE WORK
TO FINISH. LEAVE
US--!



ARROWS SLICED THE AIR WITH THEIR DEADLY SHRIEK. BLADES CUT THE SHRILL SCREAMING SILENCE IN MOANS OF DEATH, AND THE BLOOD OF THE WARLESS PEACELOVING "DEMONS" PAINTED THE EARTH CRIMSON... THE EARTH THEY HAD LOVED... RESPECTED ... AND CAME TO CALL THEIR OWN



AND THROUGH IT ALL, TWO SILENT, TEAR-FILLED EYES COULD ONLY WATCH THE HORROR... AND WISH... AND HOPE FOR THE MIRACLE THAT WAS SO DESPERATELY NEEDED.



A MIRACLE OF SURVIVAL!



A MIRACLE OF LIFE.

A-A DRAGON!

LORD! SAVE US FROM THE DEVILS MAGICKS!

ROWWWWWWW!



KILL THEM FLUFF! DESTROY THE CUTTHROAT PIRATES!

ROWWWWWWW!



BUT EVEN MIRACLES CAN BE MORTAL...
DESTROYED BY SOMETHING FAR MORE
TANGIBLE... REALITY!



WOODO!

D-DADDY... DADDY... YOU
KILLED THEM! YOU
MURDERED KING
BUBBA, YOU KILLED
FLUFF... THE
OTHERS!



JACKIE / SON?
WE DID IT FOR
YOU!

WE'VE RESCUED
YOU FROM THE DEVILS...
SAVED YOU!



WOODO! YOU CAN'T
KILL HIM! YOU CAN'T
KILL FLUFF!

HE WON'T
DIE! H-H HE
WON'T!

SON!

JACKIE!



THEY HAD YOU UNDER
THEIR SPELL, SON! THEY
HAD YOU THINKING THEY
WERE GOOD... AND WE
WERE THE EVIL ONES!

DON'T
YOU SEE?



YOU'VE GOT TO
UNDERSTAND THAT, SON!
WE'VE SAVED YOU FROM
THE DEMON MONSTERS!



SON-DAD ME ?

SON !

SON EVERYTHING
WILL BE ALL RIGHT
FROM NOW ON!

THERE WAS A TIME...WHEN DREAMS
WERE ALL HE HAD, THERE WAS A TIME
WHEN JACKIE PAPER WAS A
DREAMER, AND THE WORLD WAS
FILLED WITH SUNSHINE, LOVE AND
THE WONDERFUL SHELL OF BLOSSOMS.

BUT THE DAY JACKIE BECAME A **MAN**
THE WORLD OF IMAGINATION AND
ADVENTURE WAS **LOST** TO HIM FOREVER.

AND IT WAS A PITY FOR EVEN IN
IMAGINATION, THERE WERE
BEAUTIFUL REALITIES.

THE LARGER MOON OF IRITH WAS
SETTING AS THE MORNING SUN CLIMBED
INTO THE SKY. THE FOREST TRILLED,
CHIRPED AND HUMMED TO ANNOUNCE
THE DAWN. BUT THE OVERTURE THIS
MORNING WAS A ...

HE STOOD TRANFIXED,
THE LOVELIEST UPON HIM,
FOR HE HAD NEVER IN HIS
LIFE SEEN ANYTHING SO
BEAUTIFUL ...

PRELUDE TO ARMAGEDDON



THEN...



THEY COULD NOT UNDERSTAND
EACH OTHER, BUT TO EQUINUS
HER VOICE WAS MUSIC ...



SENATOR EQUINUS,
MESSENGER OF THE
BODES, PAUSED ON HIS
ERRAND... ATTRACTED
BY A CLEAR, SILVERY
VOICE, HE FOLLOWED
THE SOUND TO A
CRYSTAL POOL WHERE
HE SAW HER, A PALE
FLAME IN THE
SHADOWS...

...WHILE, TO
THE MAIDEN,
HIS WAS THE
ROARING OF
A BEAST...

THEN, A
RUSTLE
OF
MIGHTY
WINGS...

I SHOULD
HAVE KNOWN...

...SHE IS ONE OF
THE **DRAGON
RIDERS!**

THE WIND SHIFTED
AND THE CLOUDS
PARTED, TO REVEAL...

WINGED
DEMON!

AS SHE STRUCK THE GROUND,
EQUINUS COULD HEAR THE
SOUND OF BONES BREAKING...

WITHOUT BREAKING HIS STRIDE,
HE SCOOPED HER UP IN HIS ARMS.

THE RING!...
MY ONLY
CHANCE!

SKREEE!

SKREEE!

THEY ARE IN
RANGE... I FEAR
I WILL NOT
MAKE IT...

BUT JUST IN TIME, HE PLUNGED INTO THE COMFORTING SHADOWS OF THE RUINED CITY...



...THE RUINED CAPITAL OF THE DEAD CIVILIZATION OF ANCIENT IRITH...

O GREAT BATORIS... I, SENEOR E QUINIAS, YOUR OBEISANT SERVANT, CALL UPON YOU...



HIS HEARTFELT PLEA WAS HEARD ON HIGH...

SPEAK, FAITHFUL SENEOR! MY FOLLOWERS NEED NEVER FEAR THAT THEIR PLEAS ARE IN VAIN...



LORD OF LIFE AND LOVE, I ASK NOTHING FOR MYSELF, BUT...



...FOR THIS INNOCENT GIRL, WHO LIES SO NEAR DEATH... I ASK THAT YOU GIVE HER THE GIFT THAT ONLY YOU CAN BESTOW... LIFE!



AH, BACHELOR! YOU HAVE FOUND A MATE AT LAST... THIS PLEASURES ME!



OF COURSE, I WILL GRANT YOUR REQUEST...

...AND THE BREATH OF LIFE WAS GIVEN THE DRAGON RIDER...



IT WAS NOT I WHO GAVE YOU BACK YOUR LIFE, LITTLE ONE... BUT YOU ARE INCAPABLE OF UNDERSTANDING THAT...

VERY WELL, I WILL ACCEPT YOUR GRATITUDE.





THE LIGHT FOR REVENGE UPON HIM, EQUINUS THUNDERED INTO THE OBRES WITH FLASHING SWORD AND CRUSHING HOOVES...

THE SHORTEST WAY TO CIRILUS GORSOROTH IS STRAIGHT THROUGH THEM!

DO NOT BE AFRAID, MELODY... THESE PUNY CREATURES CAN DO NOTHING AGAINST SENTOR EQUINUS!

IT WAS INCREDIBLE THAT THIS WOULD BE A WORLD AT WAR...THE SUN WAS WARM UPON THEM AS THEY MADE A LUNCH OF WILD FRUITS AND BERRIES...

I HAVE LIVED IN PARADISE ALL OF MY LIFE...

...BUT I HAVE NEVER BEEN HAPPY UNTIL NOW!



THEN, AS THEY PROCEEDED...

WHO DARES KILL THE MINIONS OF MINOS TAURUS?

I, SENTOR EQUINUS!

A BELLOW OF RAGE ECHOED IN HIS HELMET AS MINOS TAURUS LUNGED FORWARD...

THEN DIE, FOOL!

MANY HAVE TRIED FRIEND!

THE FIGHT WAS LONG AND TERRIBLE...A WELL-AIMED BLOW LANDED ON THE HELMET OF MINOS TAURUS...

THE WAR SPREAD...DRAGON RIDERS PULSED AN ARMY OF OBRES FROM THE FOREST...



...OUT INTO THE OPEN PLAIN, WHERE THEY WERE NO MATCH FOR THE CHARGE OF A CAVALRY COMPOSED OF HIGHLY TRAINED, DISCIPLINED CENTAUR LANCERS...



AGE OLD HATREDS PROVE BOTH SIDES TO DEEDS OF INCREDIBLE BRAVERY AND CRUELTY. NO WOUNDED SURVIVORS CRAWLED AWAY FROM THIS ENCOUNTER... FOR EVERY COMBAT WAS FOUGHT TO THE DEATH...



SENTOR EGLINUS FOUGHT LIKE A MADMAN, BUT THE TERRIBLE CHAIN MACE OF MINDS TAURUS STRUCK HIM AGAIN AND AGAIN...



BLOOD GUSHED FROM HIS LACERATED CHEST, AND FROM HIS HEAD, BLINDING HIM... HE FELT HIS STRENGTH POURING OUT WITH IT...



A FINAL, CRUSHING BLOW, AND HE WAS DOWN...



THE AERIAL BATTLE HAD GONE WELL FOR THE FORCES OF SATORIS, AND DRAGON RIDERS WERE HUNTING DOWN THE REMAINING MEN WITH FIRE BOLTS...

WE HAVE
LOST,
MY LORD...

DO NOT DESPAIR
YET! THERE IS ONE
FINAL WEAPON...
I HESITATED TO
USE IT, BUT NOW
WE **MUST!**
LEAVE ME!
I SHALL CALL
UPON BLUD
TO COME TO
OUR AID...

KARION CHANTED AN
ANCIENT INVOCATION...

...AND IN ANSWER, LOATHSOME SHAPES
ROSE UP FROM THE GROUND..

...AN INVOCATION COM-
POSED OF CURSES
AND BLASPHEMES...

WHY DO
YOU PAUSE?
KILL ME
AND BE
DONE!

THERE IS NO NEED,
YOU ARE ALREADY
DEAD... WE ARE
ALL DEAD!

AN ARMY OF
MINDLESS
DEAD BODIES
FULL OF HATE
FOR ALL
LIVING THINGS
AND CHARGED
WITH
PSEUDO-LIFE
RAGED ACROSS
THE FACE OF
IRITH...



YOU ARE
WITH US,
MINOS
TAURUS?



YES...
I DID
NOT
BELIEVE
EVEN
KARON
WOULD
DO...
THIS!



MELODY!



I KNOW,
LITTLE ONE...
I LOVE YOU
TOO! NOW JUST
CLOSE YOUR
EYES! I WILL
BE WITH YOU
SOON...



...AND
NOW...



SENOR EQUINUS!
YOU'RE WASTING
TIME... THE DEAD
OUTNUMBER THE
LIVING! WE ARE
DEFEATED! THIS
IS NOT YOUR FUNCTION...
IT IS NOT ACCOMPLISH-
ING THE MISSION I
SENT YOU ON!




NOW GO! GO TO
CIRIUS GORGOROTH!
FIND THE MICROCOSM
AND DO WHAT
MUST BE DONE!
AND HURRY!!


WITH THE AWFUL
STRENGTH OF
MADNESS, THE
TWO BECOME A
JUGGERNAUT,
CRUSHING PETID,
CORRUPT
BODIES IN A
WIDE PATH OF
DESTRUCTION...



HURRY! THERE
IS NOT MUCH
LEFT.



THE MIGHTY TAURIUS COVERED SENOR'S
DEPARTURE, FIGHTING AS HE HAD NEVER
FOUGHT... BUT, THOUGH HE SMASHED
AND CUT THE DEAD INTO FRAGMENTS...



...THE FRAGMENTS CONTINUED TO
ATTACK!

...AND AT LAST, MINDS TAURUS, THE ONLY SHIELD BETWEEN EQUINUS AND THE HORDE OF THE LIVING DEAD, RECEIVED A MORTAL THRUST...



...AND STILL HE REFUSED TO FALL, BUT CONTINUED TO REND AND CUT AND SMASH EVERYTHING THAT CAME WITHIN REACH...

BUT BY THEN THE CENTAUR, GUIDED BY SATORIS, WAS IN THE HEART OF CRIUS BORGOROTH... AND THEN HE SAW IT...

THE *MICROCOSM!*

I AM HERE O' LORD. WHAT MUST I DO? CAN YOU TELL ME NOW?

YES, GOOD SENTER... YOU ARE MY ONLY HOPE NOW... IT IS BETTER THAT EVERYONE DIE THAN A WORLD DOMINATED BY BLUD AND THE LIVING DEAD...

AND NOW?

BREAK THE MOON!

NOW GO... FIND THE GLOBE WITH TWO LARGE SATELLITES.



FOR A MOMENT, HE DID NOT KNOW WHETHER THIS WAS REALLY A TINY FACSIMILE OR WHETHER HE WAS SUDDENLY AS LARGE AS THE ENTIRE UNIVERSE... HE REACHED OUT A HAND, SEIZED THE TINY MOON, CRUSHED IT...



...AND DIED.



...AND EARTH'S
NEAREST MOON
EXPLODED!

EARTHQUAKES
TORE THE
CONTINENT
IN HALF...
VOLCANOES
ERUPTED
SPewing
LAVA OVER
THE BATTLE-
FIELD...

MINOS TAURUS
SUFFERED
WOUND UPON
WOUND...
AND STILL
HE FOUGHT...

MINOS! WHAT ARE YOU DOING?
YOU FIGHT YOUR OWN...

KARION!

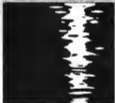
THEN MIGHTY
MINOS TAURUS
FELL...

A MOUNTAINOUS TIDAL WAVE
TOWERED OVER THE SHUDDER-
ING, TORTURED CONTINENT...



...AND CRASHED DOWN UPON IRITH, WHERE ARMIES CONTINUED TO FIGHT EVEN AS THE LAND UNDER THEIR FEET SANK INTO THE SEA...

AT LAST IT WAS OVER...
IRITH WAS GONE,
LEAVING ONLY
LEGENDS TO
MARK ITS
EXISTENCE...



BUT THERE WAS OTHER LAND
OTHER CONTINENTS, WHERE
OGRES SURVIVED...



...AND DEVELOPED INTO
THE DOMINANT SPECIES...

THE FEW DRAGONS LEFT
EVENTUALLY DIED OUT,
AND WERE REPLACED
BY NEW LIFE FORMS...



...AND THAT IS THE
STORY I DECIPHERED
FROM THESE ANCIENT
RUNES CARVED IN
STONE IN THIS CAVE,
MILES BELOW THE
SURFACE. THIS
SEEMS TO BE
THE RESTING PLACE
OF SATORIS, AND
HIS MESSAGE
GOES ON
TO SAY:



"MY PARADISE ENDED
IN CHAOS, AND I
WASHED THE CHAOS
AWAY. I AM SURE
INTELLIGENT LIFE
WILL EVOLVE AGAIN...
THAT IS THE WAY OF
THE COSMIC LIFE
FORCE..."

"... I PRAY THAT WHATEVER
FORM IT TAKES, IT WILL
FIND A WAY TO LIVE IN
PEACE AND HARMONY,
SO THAT I MAY SLEEP
FOREVER. BUT IF I AM
NEEDED AGAIN, I WILL
COME TO CLEANSE THE
EARTH WITH FIRE AND
FLOOD!"

HEH! HEH!
WELL, I
GUESS WE
CAN SLEEP...
WE WON'T
NEED HIM
AGAIN, AS WE
ARE HAPPY,
CIVILIZED
AND PEACEFUL...



...AREN'T
WE?"





A SECRET KING

IT IS 471 A.D. ROME RULES AN ANCIENT ENGLAND, AND THERE IS DARKNESS OVER THE LAND SOLELY BUT A FEW NOW KNOW IT. THIS IS THE LAST NIGHT OF DARKNESS. A SINGLE, FRAGILE LIGHT HAS BEEN CREATED AND FAINTURED CAREFULLY, ONE DAY, IT WILL ILLUMINATE THE EARTH FOR FIFTEEN HUNDRED YEARS TO COME.



IT IS A DARKSOME NOVEMBER. A MAN CHILD WAS BORN OF KING UTHUR, PENDOR, SON AND HIS WIFE TOR, IRE. A CHILD UTHUR WOULD NEVER SEE. IN A VERY SPECIAL CHILD, TO BE BORN ONLY BY SECRECY, CLOAKED AND PROTECTED BY POWERS NOT UNDERSTOOD. A VERY SPECIAL CHILD. A SECRET KING.

AND THEY NAMED HIM... *ARTHUR*.















GRW GRW!
ART THOU HOME?



WELCOME TO
MY CHAMBERS,
O' MERLINUS!

WHAT CHANCE THY
FERNED RIGHTEOUS
FEET THIS WAY COME?

YOU KNOW
WHY I COME,
GRW GRW!



CALL OFF YOUR
DOGS!

DOGS? I HAVE
NO DOGS, MAYBE A
FELINE FAMILIAR,
BUT NO O'--

LISTEN TO ME,
YOU PRUD! DEWE! THOSE
BLACK RIDERS RUINED MY
HOUSE, STOLE MY STONE,
AND FRIGHTENED MY
CHILDREN. CALL THEM
OFF! AND RETURN
MY STONE! NOW!

HAS SOMEONE
RUINED MERLIN'S
POWERPE, AY?



YOU AND EVERY
OTHER WIZARD KNOW
I SEEK NOT
PERSONAL POWER.

BY THWARTING
ME, YOU THWART
THE DESTINY OF
HISTORY
FUTURE!



WHATEVER YOUR
INTENTIONS OF
GRANDBUR, MERLIN,
I HATE IT, BUT
I HAVE NO RIDERS
AND KNOW NOT
OF YOUR PRECIOUS
STONE!



YOU ARE DESPISED
BY YOUR PEERS IN MAGIC
FOR YOU ARE GREEDY
AND ASPIRE TO
IMMORTALITY.

I ONLY WISH I
DID TAKE YOUR STONE!
HE THAT DID IS MY
HERO!



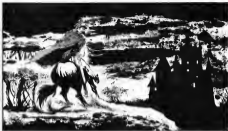
I WILL FIND YOUR
HERO AND MY STONE
...AND WILL DELIVER
YOUR ADMIRATIONS
...THUS!

EYYARR!



IT IS THE
LEAGUE OF
MAGICIANS THAT
HAS DONE THIS.

I CANNOT
DESTROY THEM
... BUT THEIR
RIDERS ...
CAN!



QUICKLY GUARD...
WHERE IS KING
UTHER?

TH... THE KING
REPOSES WITHIN HIS
CHAMBERS, BUT...



IS Uther
ASLEEP NURSE?

MY LORD... KING Uther
LIES AT THE GATES OF
DEATH. A GRAVE ILLNESS
HAS LONG HELD HIM IN
SLAY.

BE GENTLE IF YOU SPEAK
TO HIM... HE HAS... NOT LONG
THANK GOD, YOU'VE COME...
HE LONGS FOR YOU AND...
HIS SON.



MY LORD Uther
WHY DID YOU NOT
SEND FOR ME?

THESE ARE PERILOUS
DAYS. YOU HAVE TROUBLES
ENOUGH, DEAR FRIEND.
-OH-, HOW IS MY SON?



UTHER, THE MAGICIAN'S
COUNCIL, WHICH HATES ME BE-
CAUSE I CONDEMNED THEIR BORN,
WAS UNLEASHED BLACK ROGERS
ON ME. THEY TOOK THE STONE
AND... ARTHUR IS IN GRAVE
DANGER.

HAVE THEY TAKEN
ARTHUR? IS HE SAFE?



MY FAMILIAR, SNIVEL ROSE
WITH HIM TO THE SAFETY OF
ECTOR'S CASTLE. I CAN ONLY
HOPE THEY REACHED ECTOR
BEFORE THE BLACK ONES
OVERTOOK THEM. I WENT
TO RECOVER MY STONE.

I... I ONLY CAME
HERE TO... TO BRING
YOU A... GIFT. I KNEW
NOT OF YOUR
ILLNESS.



MERLIN... OH, SWEET FRIEND...
BRINGING ME THE MOST PRECIOUS
GIFT... THE SIGHT OF MY SON'S
FACE. AH!... MERLIN... I...
DIE NOW... SO HAPPY... SO
FEARFUL.

CARE FOR HIM...
TELL HIM OF MY LOVE...
MAKE THE SIGN FOR
ME... MERLIN...



NURSE... PREPARE THE
KING'S ROBES. THERE IS
A REGAL... FUNERAL TO
PREPARE. THE KING IS
DEAD. GOD... OH GOD.

AND WHERE NOW...
IS MY SECRET
KING... ARTHUR?



DOWN BY THE CORNISH SEA, THE SORCERER
DROPS HIS ROBES...



MARRY
MYRK, YOU HAVE
VISITORS!

...AND A NEW MERLIN
WAS IN THE
MURKY WATERS.



I BUT CAN
HOPE THY WITTY
DRAINBRIDGE IS
DOWN!



MARRY MYRK!
IT IS MERLIN!



MERLIN? BY GOD'S
GILLS! OLD MYRK AINT
LAD EYES ON YOU SINCE
YOU OUIT THE DRUMS FOR
SACRIFICE! LIVE BABIES!
COME GIVE US A NUG,
MATE!



WELL, WAL! SO THAT'S
WHAT YE BIN DOIN' AWH
THESE YEARS! AND WE
THINK YE INUZ DEAD!
BEARN' UP YOUNG ENGLISH
PRINCES! WAL, WAL!
GRAND OL' MERLIN!

JUST ONE
YOUNG PRINCE.
AND HE'S
ENOUGH!



NOT MANY SAILORS IN THESE
CORNISH WATERS THESE DAYS
YOUVE BITTEN ALL NEAR
ABOUT I SEE YOUR LADERS
ARE SPARSE OF MEAT.

HOW WOULD LIKE TO HAVE
A WHOLE LOAD OF MAN
MEAT FOR YOUR HOOKS, AND
GET TO BE PERSONAL FRIENDS
WITH THE NEW KING OF
ALL ENGLAND?



NOW, SEE HERE, MY YOUNG FELLOW, YOU CAN'T KEEP GOING ON AN EMPTY STOMACH, NOW SAY! I PROMISED MERLIN YOU'D BE WELL TAKE CARE OF

I JUST KEEP THINKING OF POOR SHIVEL, SIR, WHAT ABOUT HER?



OH, DAMNIT ALL SORRY! DAMNIT, I SAY!

WHY, KAY? THIS IS NO WAY FOR A SON OF MINE TO ACT! WHAT'S WRONG WITH YE LAD?

IT'S THAT BRAT, FATHER, AND ALL THESE GOWNS ON! ROMANS, BLACK RIDERS AND WANDRERS ALL SWARMIN' WITHOUT THE CASTLE! MYSTERY, INTRIGUE! WHY NOW?



HOW WOULD YOU LIKE A PINCH ON THE EAR, YOU BRAT!

THE GREAT TOURNAMENT IN LONDON IS IN TWO WEEKS AND I PLAN TO WIN ALL THE EVENTS!

HEY! OUCH!

AND I DON'T LIKE ALL THIS DARK HUSBUB OVER THE LIKES OF LITTLE LORD ARTHUR, HERE!



HERE NOW, KAY! HOLD ALL OF THAT! IF OLD MERLIN HAS ANYTHING TO DO WITH IT, ALL THESE DOINGS WILL BE OVER BY TIME FOR THE LONDON TOURNAMENTS

AND... HEY YOUNG ARTHUR HERE, CAN GO ALONG TOO! BY GOD, AS YOUR SQUIRE! BY GOD SIR KAY SHALL HAVE A SQUIRE TO ATTEND HIM! WOULD YE LIKE THAT, BOY?

I WANT TO FIND MY POOR SHIVEL!



SURE? I HAVE TO GO OUT THERE AND BRING HER IN, SHE'S BEEN MY BEST FRIEND, BESIDES MERLIN, ALL MY LIFE. SORTA LIKE MY MOTHER... IN A WAY OR... MY BROTHER IN ANOTHER.

SHUNK, MY BOY YOU SAID YOURSELF YE SAW A SWORD SPILL HER VITALS OUT, YE CAN'T HELP THE DEAD, BRIDES... THERE BE BOOGERS OUT THERE, LEAVE 'EM ALL BE.





DO YOU REALIZE WHAT THE DARK COUNCIL WILL DO TO US FOR STEALING THIS OBVIOUS FAKERY?

THERE'S ONLY ONE THING TO DO: BARGAIN WITH MERLIN FOR THE REAL ONE.

BARGAIN WITH MERLIN? HE'D TURN US INTO WORMWEAR! IN BOX OF WIZARDS!



WOOF! LOOKEE! WAHAA! SEE WHAT I CATCHED LURKING OUTSIDE ECTOR'S FORTRESS! A YOUNG FALCON!

THE BOY! BY OCTUS!

LET LOOSE OF ME, YOU HEATHENS! ECTOR'S KNIGHTS ARE RIGHT BEHIND ME!

AND SIR ECTOR AT THEIR FORE, I SUPPOSE!



TAKE THIS AND HUSH YE! I KNOW NOT WHAT WORTH THIS SACKLING, BUT OUR MASTERS WERE FIRM IN VOICING HIS GREAT VALUE... SONGWAY! BUT WE HAVE HIM NOW!

WHAT SHALL WE DO WITH HIM?



WHAT WERE YE DOING IN THE FOREST, BOY?

I STOLE OUT TO FIND THE BODY OF MY FRIEND SIVVEL, THE GIRL YOU MURDERED!

NO! WE'VE ALREADY EAT HER SMELLY CORPSE!

BUT NOW... WE'VE GOT YOU... AS BARGAINING POWER!



AND HOW WILL YOU USE THY BARGAINING POWERS? FOR OR AGAINST WHOM?

THAT IS THE MANT MERLIN'S SERVANT!

FOOL! THAT IS MERLIN, HIMSELF!

THE BETTER THEN! COME, OLD BUZZARD! GIVE US THE REAL STONE AND WE'LL HAVE YOU BACK THE BOY!

MISSBOTTEN IDIOTS! YOU HAVE STOLEN THE **WYRONG** STONE, AND THIS PLAN TO EXCHANGE IT FOR THE **REAL**, WITH THE LIFE OF A STUPID **SERVANT BOY!** HAHAHA! STILL...



...THE BOY IS MORE USEFUL TO ME THAN A **PRETTY STONE** RIVEN INTO A ROCK.



I KNOW WHY YOUR WATERS SENT YOU INTO RANGER FOR SUCH A **USELESS TANKET.**

HERE!

TAKE MY SILLY BAUBLE IF IT MEANS SO MUCH TO YOU! AND LEAVE MY **SLAVE BOY** ON THIS ISLAND WHEN YOU'VE GONE!



YEEHAAAA! IDIOTS! STONES! AND JUNKIES! HAHA!

OHMN! HE'S **RIGHT!** RISKING OUR LIVES FOR SUCH **FOOLISHARY!** OLD MERLIN **LAUGHS** AT US!

WELL...NEVER THEE MIND, LEAVE US **FINISH** THIS TASK, AND GO HOME... BRING THE **BRAT! SERVANT BOYS** AND **BAUBLES!** UHN!



WE'LL HAVE A LOOK AT THE **"PRECIOUS TOY"** AND GO OUR WAY.

MERLIN DEFEATS US BY LEAVING IT TO US, **DMNN!**



LIAR!! THAT OLD LIAR HAS **TRICKED** US! THIS IS BUT A **CHEAP FORGERY!** FOR THIS, HE'LL NOT HAVE HIS **STONE, HIS FAKE** OR HIS **SERVANT!**

KILL THE BRAT!

MERLIN!!







TIS DONE, AND DAMNED!
ARTHUR IS SAFE! SNIVEL
IMMORTAL AS ALWAYS! DEAR
OLD MYRK HAS HIS FRESH
MEAT AND I... HAVE
BACK MY STONE.

AND EVEN THESE
BLACK RIDERS HAVE SOME-
THING... THE RELIEF OF NOT
HAVING TO REPORT BACK TO
THEIR MASTERS THEY
HAVE FAILED.



I'M SORRY YOU
WERE WORRIED, BUT
WE MAGICIAN'S FAMILIARS
HAVE MORE LIVES THAN CATS.
NOW THAT I THINK OF IT...
I... USED TO BE A CAT.
AH, WELL, ALL IS
FINE NOW, EH?

MERLIN BROUGHT
YOU BACK TO
LIFE, DIDN'T
HE, SNIVEL?



ALL JUST
ANOTHER
LESSON FOR
YOUR STUDIES,
MY BOY.
MERELY THAT.

WELL, ARTHUR, FOR ME,
IT'S OFF TO LONDON FOR
A BUSINESS TRIP... AND
FOR YOU, BACK TO
ECTOR'S... FOR SQUIRE
TRAINING.



CAN'T I GO
WITH YOU,
MERLIN?

YOU GO LEARN
COURTLY MANNERS
WITH SIR KAY AND
ECTOR! PERHAPS
I'LL SEE YOU
LATER.



SNIVEL! DELIVER
THE BOY TO ECTOR
AND COME ALONG
TO LONDON, WORK
TO DO, Y'KNOW.

EPICURE! ...A SNOWY PORTNIGHT LATER IN LONDON.



ALL OF THEM, I SHOULD EXPECT TO WIN AS MANY NOW SQUIRE, HAND ME MY SWORD THAT I MAY OFFICIALLY ENTER WITH THE JUDGES TABLES.



DAMN IT ALL YOU BRAT! YOU'VE FORGOTTEN TO PACK MY SWORD! I'LL CLUB YOU FOR THIS! I CANNOT ENTER A SINGLE GAME WITHOUT IT!

I'M SORRY, KAY! I'LL GO FIND YOU A SWORD! SOMEWHERE!

ALL IS LOST! ALL BECAUSE OF YOUR STUPIDITY BRAT!

I'LL BE BACK SOON, KAY!

SIR KAY!



BY CRACKY! THIS IS THE MOST WONDERFUL CITY OF ALL! IF I WERE KING I'D MAKE EACH DAY A WONDERFUL DAY LIKE THIS! CRACKY!

HEY, ARTHUR!



HAVING A VERY MERRY FESTIVAL, ARTHUR?

MERLIN! SNIVEL! HOW FINE!

YOU MEAN, SQUIRE ARTHUR, MERLIN! COME ALONG, AND HAVE SOME SWEETIES AND HOT MEAD!





I'M IN GREAT TROUBLE, Y'KNOW. I FORGOT TO BRING KAY'S SWORD AND NOW I HAVE TO FIND HIM ANOTHER ONE.

OH?



BUT SAY, IT'S SO GREAT TO SEE YOU AGAIN, WHY DID YOU HAVE TO COME TO LONDON ANYWAY?

OH... I HAD TO DELIVER SOMETHING FOR THE KING.

BUT THERE IS NO KING SINCE LUTHER DIED.

WELL, RIGHT YOU ARE!



SAY... I JUST HAPPEN TO KNOW WHERE THERE'S A SWORD YOU MIGHT HAVE.

REALLY, SIRE? WHERE?

RIGHT & BEHIND ME, THE TOWER IN THE COURTYARD.



LOOK! THERE IS A SWORD! AND... IT LOOKS... FAMILIAR.

ALL SWORDS LOOK ALIKE, Y'KNOW.

HOW JOEY'S CAN BRING IT TO KAY SO HE WON'T BE LATE FOR THE GAMES!



IT'S SO BEAUTIFUL! OF COURSE I'LL JUST BORROW IT... I'D BRING IT BACK, OF COURSE.

OUT OF COURSE, SURE!



GO ON, ARTHUR. THE SWORD IS THERE FOR YOU TO USE.

ARE YOU CERTAIN IT'LL BE ALRIGHT?



I'M CERTAIN.

UH OH, MERLIN, I CANNOT TAKE THE SWORD SOMETHING'S WRITTEN ON THE STONE.



NEVER MIND THAT IT SAYS NOTHING THAT WOULD CONCERN A LITTLE SQUIRE.



GO AHEAD... KAY IS PROBABLY WAITING FOR IT... IN FACT...



...THE WHOLE WORLD? IS WAITING... MY LOVE?... ARTHUR!

WHOEVER SHALL FULFILL THE SWORD FROM THE STONE SHALL BE CALLED KNIGHT-KING BY ALL MEN AND BY THE GRACE OF GOD AND DISTINY.



ALIEN WINGS BEAT FORBODDINGLY UPON VIOLENT WINDS THIS NIGHT.



HEAVEN AND EARTH TREMBLE...



...AS GODS AWAKEN...



...IN MALEVOLENT SILENCE.

DAX^{the} DAMNED

LONG HAVE I KNOWN MY LIFE IS CURSED BY THE GODS, DAX IS NO MORE THAN A TORMENTED PLAYTHING, SOMETHING TO BE PROVOKED, USED DAMNED AM I BY NATURE OF MY LIFE. A WARRIOR BEARS HIS SWORD ONLY WHERE THE GODS STEER HIS PATH. I AM A WARRIOR, NOTHING MORE THAN A PAWN UPON SOME SUPERNATURAL BOARD, IN A TIMELESS GAME OF...

CHESS

STORY: ESTEBAN MAROTO / ART: ESTEBAN MAROTO



AN IDLE GOD FILLED
WITH TORTURE, BENT
LOW ACROSS THE EARTH
AND FOUND HIS *AMM*,
AND DAX WAS DRAWN
THROUGH THE *NETHER*.



FALLING BEYOND
ENDLESSNESS, MY
STRAINED EYES SAW
THAT WHICH WAS
NEITHER PROPHET
NOR SEER, NOR
DREAMER NOR
HIDMAN HAS
DARED TO BEHOLD.



MY DESCENT SLOWED
AND GENTLY TOUCHED
I THE FLINT, AND *LO!*
DAX WAS WITHIN THE
HALLS OF THE MOST
HOLY, SURELY.



DAX, DEAR BOY
HULLO! I CAST A
PROJECTION TO
FETCH YOU I AM
ATROPOS. I REPRESENT
THE DESTINY THAT NEITHER
NIEN NOR GODS CAN CHANGE.
YOU SEE, I HAVE INVENTED
AN EXCITING *GAME*,
AND NEEDED SOMEONE
TO HELP ME PLAY IT.





I'M A
GAMBLER, A
GAMBLER SUPREME.
I HUNGER AND PLAY
ANYTHING AND ALL,
AND I HAVE A GAME
OF **DEATH** AND
LIFE TO PLAY.



I'M NO GAMESTER, LORD
ONLY A **SWORDMAN**.
A WARRIOR, I PLAY **NOT**.
WHY CHOOSE **ME?**



I CHOOSE **YOU**
BECAUSE YOU ARE **ALREADY**
MARKED BY THE GODS FOR
TORMENT. I'M A LESSER
LORD HERE, AND MAY ONLY
USE THOSE **ALREADY**
DAMNED.



I KNOW THE GREAT
LORDS USE YOU FREELY
LIKE A PAWN OF CHESS.
I **PITY** YOU. THEREFORE,
I GIVE THE CHANCE TO
BE AS ONE OF YOUR
TORMENTORS...




...TO BE AS
A **GOD!**



IN **THIS** GAME DAX
WILL HOLD THE VERY
POWER OF LIFE...
AND DEATH IN HIS
HAND.



NEVER BEFORE HAD I
REFUSED A **CHALLENGE**.
BUT NOW...



YOU **KNOW** THE TASTE OF
BEING BUT A CHESSPIECE AS
BITTER. NOW TASTE THE
LUXURY OF BEING A **PLAYER**.
A **GOD!** YOUR CHESSPIECES
ASSEMBLE! EVEN NOW
BEHOLD!

MY HEART LEAPED WHEN MY EYES WITNESSED THE WHITE FIGURES MATERIALIZE BEFORE ME. MY FATHER, BROTHER, KINSMEN AND FRIENDS I LOVED WELL, I LOVED THEM ALL STILL, EVEN IN **DEATH!** MY **CHESSMEN.**



YOU MAY HAVE EACH ONE BACK IN LIFE IF YOU **WIN** MY GAME.



YET WITH EACH MOVE YOU LOSE, ONE WILL **DIE** AGAIN, UNTIL ALL ARE BACK WITHIN THE WRETCHED WALLS OF **DEATH**. THEY ARE **TRULY** ALIVE NOW, BUT ARE MUTE PUPPETS TILL GAME'S END. IF **ANY** LET THEM LIVE THEN.



AND LOOK, DAX! THE BLACKS! **MY** FIGURE PIECES! **THEY** ARE AT **MY** COMMAND! I BELIEVE WE ARE READY. LET US BEGIN.

IN THE EYE OF LEERING DESTINY, WE SAT TO **PLAY**



WHAT SPORT COULD I HAVE BEEN? A CHESSPIECE IN MY HAND RATHER THAN A SWORD, A SINGLE MOVE, A MORTAL COMBAT.

WITH EACH MOVE UPON THE BOARD, THE LIVING CHESSMEN EMULATE. I LIFTED MY FIGURE, RONIUS, A COUSIN SLAIN, STIRRED TO LIFE. ATROPOPOS COUNTERED, A DEMON RUSHED AT RONIUS.



A MOVE! WRONG!...

RONIUS DIED, SCREAMING.



FORFEIT ONE PIECE, DAX, ONE LIFE.





WHAT AN ASS! NOT A
MOVE COULD I MAKE
RIGHT, PIECE BY PIECE
FELL...



...AS I NUMBLY WATCHED
FRIEND BY FRIEND
CLOVEN FELL BY DEMON.



RIPPED, GASHED,
DISEMBOWELED,
THEIR COZING
ENTRAILS FEASTED
UPON.



TWO
PIECES
LEFT DAK.
NOT EASY
EVEN BEING
A GOD, IS
IT?

THERE WAS BUT ONE WHITE PIECE LEFT, MY *FATHER*. MY SWORD TREMBLED TOWARD MY HAND.



AND FINALLY... *CHECKMATE*... WITH THE QUEEN, TO BE MATE ON THE SECOND MOVE. SAY A VERY QUICK FAREWELL TO YOUR FATHER. QUICK NOW!



ALAS.



I HAD SAT TOO LONG

NOT HIM!
NOT MY *FATHER*!
GET BACK FROM HIM, FILTH!



I RUSHED TO THE CRUMPLED LORD, YET MY FINGERS HAD NO NEED TO FEEL FOR A PULSE. HE HAD BEEN RETURNED TO MY MEMORIES.



PUT DOWN YOUR SWORD. IT HAS NO POWER HERE!

NO POWER BUT TO **SEAK** TO KILL, AND KILLING IS THE **ONLY** THING TANGIBLE. THE ONLY CAUSE WORTH PURSUING. YET I NEEDED NOT TO HAVE TRAVELED TO HEAVEN TO KILL. I AM NO GAMESTER. I AM A **KILLER**.

LET HIM LIVE!

THIS IS THE DIFFERENCE IN GODS AND MEN! I **UNDERSTAND!** GODS LIVE TO **KILL**... MEN KILL TO **LIVE**.

BRACCO!

FOOLISHLY **SIMPLE**. THANK YOU DAX! NOW **BEGONE!**

JMMNNNNN!!!

AND THE GAMESTER GOD THREW THE FISH **BACK** INTO THE POND FOR THERE WERE **OTHER** FISHERS WAITING TO NET IT. A FEVERISH DREAM HAD IT ALL BEEN.

AND DREAM IT **MIGHT** HAVE BEEN. BUT CRUELLY THEY WOULD NOT EVEN GIVE ME THE HOPE IT **WAS** A DREAM. FOR I WAS SENT ALONG A GRIM **REMINDER** OF A BITTER GAME OF CHESS

"TIS ALL A CHEQUER-BOARD OF NIGHTS AND DREMS WHERE DESTINY WITH MEN FOR PIECES PLAYS! WITHER AND THITHER MOVES, AND MATES AND SLAYS, AND ONE BY ONE IN THE CLOSET LAYS."

RUBAYAT OF OMAR KHAYYAM

END

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MANY EERIE ISSUES ARE WORTH OWNING FOR THE COVERS ALONE. CHECK THE COVERS ABOVE! YOU WILL FIND MANY FRAZZETTA MASTERPIECES. THE EGYPTIAN QUEEN ON THE COVER OF EERIE #23 IS ONE OF THE MOST MEMORABLE (AND DESIRABLE!) WOMEN HE HAS PAINTED. THERE IS THE JEFF JONES / VAUGHN BODE COLLABORATION, CASTLE IN THE CLOUDS OF EERIE #27, AND THERE IS RICH CORBEN'S BEAUTY & THE BEAST OF #32. THESE COVERS ARE NOTHING SHORT OF SPECTACULAR, AND THERE ARE MORE. MORE FRAZZETTA, MORE BODE, MORE KELLY, PLUS MANY GREATS BY THE FINE AND TALENTED SPANISH ARTIST, SANJULIAN! CHECK THEM OUT! MANY EERIE MAGAZINES WOULD BE WORTH OWNING SIMPLY FOR A SINGLE TALE THAT APPEARED IN THAT ISSUE! "FOOTSTEPS OF FRANKENSTEIN" BY REED CRANDALL WAS TERRIFYING. "IT THAT LURKS" WAS A DAN ADKINS MASTERPIECE! "DARK RIDER" BY JOHN SEVERIN WAS AN EXCELLENT WESTERN TALE. LEOPOLDO SANCHEZ' "UNHOLY CREATION" WAS TRULY HIDEOUS. AS WAS THE MUMMY/WEREWOLF SERIES BY JO-AQUIN BLAZQUEZ. AND THE UNBEATABLE "ARCHAEUS" OF ISIDRO MONES. MANY MORE!

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